

News

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Fatal Work Injuries in the Mountain States, 2002

Fatal work injuries in the Mountain¹ states totaled 506 in 2002, 27 fewer (-5.1 percent) than in 2001, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. Acting Regional Commissioner John D. Gordon reported that transportation incidents were the leading cause of on-the-job fatalities, accounting for 280 deaths or 55.3 percent of the Mountain states total. While the overall count was down, the number of fatalities from transportation incidents increased 39 over the year. (See table 1.) Fatal occupational injuries in the Mountain states accounted for about 9.2 percent of the 5,524 fatalities occurring nationwide. Nationally, fatal work injuries were down 391 over the year², resulting in the lowest count ever recorded by the fatality census since it began in 1992.

As noted, transportation incidents (including highway incidents, aircraft incidents and workers struck by vehicles among others) led the Mountain states in fatal occupational injuries. Highway incidents, in particular, were responsible for a large number of these deaths, accounting for 169 of the 280 fatalities in 2002. Over the year, deaths as the result of highway incidents increased from the 156 recorded in 2001. Overall, highway incidents made up one-third of all fatal work injuries in the Mountain states in 2002 compared to one-fourth of the total nationwide. Contact with objects and equipment was the second leading cause of deaths on the job, accounting for 60 fatalities, down from 101 deaths reported in 2001.

The largest number of fatal work injuries in the Mountain states in 2002 occurred in Colorado (123), followed by Arizona, (101), New Mexico (63), Utah (52), Montana (51), Nevada (45), Idaho (39), and Wyoming (32). Occupational fatalities declined by 16 in Colorado in 2002; however, from 1998 to 2001 the number of work-related deaths in this State steadily increased from 77 to 139. Fatalities in Idaho, Wyoming and Utah were also down over the year, with Wyoming's count returning to about the same level existing in 1998. In Arizona, fatalities increased by 14 in 2002, after ranging from 70 to 118 in the previous three years. In Nevada, the number of fatalities rose by 5, but remained below the levels experienced from 1998 through 2000. In New Mexico, fatal work injuries have been on the rise over the last two years, going from 35 in 2000 to 63 in 2002. (See table 1.)

¹ The Mountain states consist of Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming.

² In 2001, there were 5,915 fatal occupational injuries, excluding the 2,886 that occurred as a result of the terrorist attacks on September 11.

Highway incidents were the most frequent event leading to on-the-job fatalities in all eight Mountain states, though there were variations--43 percent in Montana, 41 percent in New Mexico, 38 percent in Wyoming, 36 percent in Idaho, 35 percent in Utah, 31 percent in Nevada, 30 percent in Colorado, and 26 percent in Arizona. Differences also existed within the other categories. Homicides accounted for 18 percent of all on-the-job fatalities in Arizona and 16 percent in Nevada, but 6 percent in both New Mexico and Utah. Falls to a lower level made up 16 percent of workplace deaths in Nevada, 13 percent in Wyoming, 10 percent in both Colorado and Montana, 7 percent in Arizona, and 5 percent in New Mexico. (See table 2.)

Background of the program

The Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, part of the BLS occupational safety and health statistics program, provides the most complete count of fatal work injuries available. The program uses diverse state and federal data sources to identify, verify, and profile fatal work injuries. Information about each workplace fatality (occupation and other worker characteristics, equipment being used, and circumstances of the event) is obtained by cross-referencing source documents, such as death certificates, workers' compensation records, and reports to federal and state agencies. This method assures counts are as complete and accurate as possible.

This is the eleventh year that the fatality census has been conducted in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The BLS fatality census is a federal/state cooperative venture in which costs are shared equally. Additional state-specific data are available from the participating state agencies listed in table A. Another BLS program, the Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses, profiles worker and case characteristics of nonfatal workplace injuries and illnesses that result in lost work time and presents frequency counts and incidence rates by industry. Copies of the 2002 news release on nonfatal injuries and illnesses are available from BLS by calling (816)-426-2481 or by accessing the website listed below. Incidence rates for 2002 by industry were published in December 2003, and information on 2002 worker and case characteristics will be available in April 2004. For additional data, access the BLS Internet site: <http://www.bls.gov/iif/home.htm>.

To request a copy of BLS Report 970 which includes several articles and highlights 2001 fatality data, e-mail your address to BLInfoKansasCity@bls.gov or write to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1100 Main Street, Suite 600, Kansas City, MO 64105-5133.

TECHNICAL NOTES

Definitions

For a fatality to be included in the census, the decedent must have been employed (that is working for pay, compensation, or profit) at the time of the event, engaged in a legal work activity, or present at the site of the incident as a requirement of his or her job. These criteria are generally broader than those used by federal and state agencies administering specific laws and regulations. (Fatalities that occur during a person's commute to or from work are excluded from the census counts.)

Data presented in this release include deaths occurring in 2002 that resulted from traumatic occupational injuries. An injury is defined as any intentional or unintentional wound or damage to the body resulting from acute exposure to energy, such as heat, electricity, or kinetic energy from a crash, or from the absence of such essentials as heat or oxygen caused by a specific event, incident, or series of events within a single workday or shift. Included are open wounds, intracranial and internal injuries, heatstroke, hypothermia, asphyxiation, acute poisonings resulting from short-term exposures limited to the worker's shift, suicides and homicides, and work injuries listed as underlying or contributory causes of death.

Information on work-related fatal illnesses is not reported in the BLS census and is excluded from the attached tables because the latency period of many occupational illnesses and the difficulty of linking illnesses to work exposures make identification of a universe problematic.

Measurement techniques and limitations

Data for the Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries are compiled from various federal, state, and local administrative sources—including death certificates, workers' compensation reports and claims, reports to various regulatory agencies, medical examiner reports, and police reports—as well as news and other non-governmental reports. Diverse sources are used because studies have shown that no single source captures all job-related fatalities. Source documents are matched so that each fatality is counted only once. To ensure that a fatality occurred while the decedent was at work, information is verified from two or more independent source documents or from a source document and a follow-up questionnaire. Approximately 30 data elements are collected, coded, and tabulated, including information about the worker, the fatal incident, and the machinery or equipment involved.

Identification and verification of work-related fatalities

In 2002, there were 108 cases included for which work relationship could not be independently verified; however, the information on the initiating source document for these cases was sufficient to determine that the incident was likely to be job related. Data for these fatalities, which primarily affected self-employed workers, are included in the Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries counts. An additional 28 fatalities submitted by states were not included because the initiating source document had insufficient information to determine work relationship and could not be verified by either an independent source document or a follow-up questionnaire.

States may identify additional fatal work injuries after data collection closeout for a reference year. In addition, other fatalities excluded from the published count because of insufficient information to determine work relationship may subsequently be verified as work related. States have up to one year to update their initial published state counts. This procedure insures that fatality data are disseminated as quickly as possible and that no legitimate case is excluded from the counts. Thus, each year's report should be considered preliminary until final data are issued. Over the last 5 years, increases in the published counts based on additional information have averaged less than 20 fatalities per year or less than 0.3 percent of the revised total. The BLS national news release issued September 25, 2002, reported a total of 5,900 fatal work injuries for 2001 (excluding work-related fatalities resulting from terrorist attacks on September 11). Since then, an additional 15 fatal work injuries were identified, bringing the total for 2001 to 5,915.

Beginning in 2004, BLS will release final updated numbers earlier than in past years. Previously, updated numbers were released along with the following year's data in the annual news release. Updated numbers will now be released on the BLS internet in the late spring, or about 3 or 4 months earlier than in past years.

Federal/state agency coverage

The Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries includes data for all fatal work injuries, whether the decedent was working in a job covered by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) or other federal or state agencies or was outside the scope of regulatory coverage. Thus, any comparison between the BLS fatality census counts and those released by other agencies should take into account the different coverage requirements and definitions being used by each agency.

Several federal and state agencies have jurisdiction over workplace safety and health. OSHA and affiliated agencies in states with approved safety programs cover the largest portion of the nation's workers. However, injuries and illnesses occurring in certain industries or activities, such as coal, metal, and nonmetal mining and highway, water, rail, and air transportation, are excluded from OSHA coverage because they are covered by other federal agencies, such as the Mine Safety and Health Administration and various agencies within the Department of Transportation. Fatalities occurring in activities regulated by federal agencies other than OSHA accounted for about 15 percent of the fatal work injuries in 2002.

Fatalities occurring among several other groups of workers are generally not covered by any federal or state agencies. These groups include self-employed and unpaid family workers, which accounted for about 19 percent of the fatalities; laborers on small farms, accounting for about 1 percent of the fatalities; and state and local government employees in states without OSHA-approved safety programs, which accounted for about 4 percent. (Approximately one-half of the states have approved OSHA safety programs, which cover state and local government employees.)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: BLS thanks the participating states and the District of Columbia in collecting accurate, comprehensive, and useful data on fatal injuries. BLS also appreciates the efforts of all federal, state, local, and private sector agencies that submitted source documents used to identify fatal work injuries. Among these agencies are the Occupational Safety and Health Administration; the National Transportation Safety Board; the U.S. Coast Guard; the Mine Safety and Health Administration; the Employment Standards Administration (Federal Employees' Compensation and Longshore and Harbor Workers' divisions); the Department of Energy; state vital statistics registrars, coroners, and medical examiners; state departments of health, labor and industries, and workers' compensation agencies; state and local police departments; and state farm bureaus.

Table A. CFOI participating state agencies and telephone numbers

State	Agency	Telephone number
Alabama	Department of Labor	(334) 242-3460
Alaska	Department of Labor and Workforce Development	(907) 465-4539
Arizona	Industrial Commission of Arizona	(602) 542-3739
Arkansas	Department of Labor	(501) 682-4542
California	Department of Industrial Relations	(415) 703-4776
Colorado	Department of Public Health	(303) 692-2173
Connecticut	Labor Department	(860) 566-4380
Delaware	Department of Labor	(302) 761-8223
District of Columbia	Center for Health Statistics	(202) 442-5920
Florida	Department of Financial Services	(850) 922-8953 ext. 113
Georgia	Department of Labor	(404) 679-0687
Hawaii	Department of Labor and Industrial Relations	(808) 586-9001
Idaho	Industrial Commission	(208) 334-6090
Illinois	Department of Public Health	(217) 782-5750
Indiana	Department of Labor	(317) 232-2668
Iowa	Division of Labor Services	(515) 281-5151
Kansas	Department of Health and Environment	(785) 296-1058
Kentucky	Labor Cabinet	(502) 564-3070 ext. 281
Louisiana	Department of Labor	(225) 342-3126
Maine	Bureau of Labor Standards	(207) 624-6440
Maryland	Division of Labor and Industry	(410) 767-2356
Massachusetts	Department of Public Health	(617) 624-5627
Michigan	Department of Consumer and Industry Services	(517) 322-1851
Minnesota	Department of Labor and Industry	(651) 284-5568
Mississippi	Department of Health	(601) 576-7186
Missouri	Department of Health	(573) 751-2454
Montana	Department of Labor and Industry	(406) 444-3297
Nebraska	Workers' Compensation Court	(402) 471-3547
Nevada	Division of Industrial Relations	(775) 684-7081
New Hampshire	Department of Public Health	(603) 271-4647
New Jersey	Department of Health and Senior Services	(609) 984-1863
New Mexico	Occupational Health and Safety Bureau	(505) 827-4230
New York State	Department of Health	(518) 402-7900
New York City	Department of Health	(212) 788-4585
North Carolina	Department of Labor	(919) 733-0337
North Dakota	U.S. Department of Labor	(312) 353-7253
Ohio	Department of Health	(614) 466-4183
Oklahoma	Department of Labor	(405) 528-1500
Oregon	Department of Consumer and Business Services	(503) 947-7051
Pennsylvania	Department of Health	(717) 783-2548
Rhode Island	Department of Health	(401) 222-2812
South Carolina	Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation	(803) 734-4298
South Dakota	U.S. Department of Labor	(312) 353-7253
Tennessee	Department of Labor and Workforce Development	(615) 741-1749
Texas	Workers' Compensation Commission	(512) 804-4637
Utah	Labor Commission	(801) 530-6823
Vermont	Department of Labor and Industry	(802) 828-5076
Virginia	Department of Labor and Industry	(804) 786-6427
Washington	Department of Labor and Industries	(360) 902-5512
West Virginia	Department of Labor	(304) 558-7890
Wisconsin	Department of Workforce Development	(608) 266-7850
Wyoming	Department of Employment, Research and Planning	(307) 473-3819

Table 1. Fatal occupational injuries for the United States and states in the Mountain states, 1998-2002

State	Year					1998-2002 average
	1998	1999	2000	2001 1/	2002	
United States	6,055	6,054	5,920	5,915	5,524	5894
Mountain	468	451	495	533	506	491
Arizona	74	70	118	87	101	90
Colorado	77	106	117	139	123	112
Idaho	51	43	35	45	39	43
Montana	58	49	42	58	51	52
Nevada	60	58	51	40	45	51
New Mexico	48	39	35	59	63	49
Utah	67	54	61	65	52	60
Wyoming	33	32	36	40	32	35

1/ The BLS news release issued September 25, 2002 reported a total of 5,900 fatal work injuries for calendar year 2001. Since then, an additional 15 job-related fatalities were identified, bringing the total job-related fatality count for 2001 to 5,915. Totals for 2001 exclude fatalities from the September 11 terrorist attacks.

Table 2. Fatal occupational injuries by detailed event or exposure in the United States and the Mountain states, 2002

Event or exposure 1/	Fatalities					
	United States		Arizona		Colorado	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	5,524	100	101	100	123	100
Transportation incidents	2,381	43	52	51	61	50
Highway	1,372	25	26	26	37	30
Nonhighway incident, except rail, air, water	322	6	4	4	--	--
Aircraft	192	3	9	9	9	7
Worker struck by vehicle, mobile equipment	356	6	11	11	10	8
Assaults and violent acts	840	15	21	21	27	22
Homicides	609	11	18	18	13	11
Self-inflicted injuries	199	4	3	3	14	11
Contact with objects and equipment	873	16	8	8	14	11
Struck by object	506	9	6	6	9	7
Caught in or compressed by equipment or objects	231	4	--	--	3	2
Caught in or crushed in collapsing materials	116	2	--	--	--	--
Falls	714	13	10	10	15	12
Fall to lower level	634	11	7	7	12	10
Exposure to harmful substances or environments	538	10	8	8	6	5
Contact with electrical current	289	5	4	4	--	--
Fires and explosions	165	3	--	--	--	--

See footnotes at end of table.

Table 2. Fatal occupational injuries by detailed event or exposure in the United States and the Mountain states, 2002

(continued)

Event or exposure 1/	Fatalities					
	Idaho		Montana		Nevada	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	39	100	51	100	45	100
Transportation incidents	29	74	29	57	20	44
Highway	14	36	22	43	14	31
Nonhighway incident, except rail, air, water	4	10	5	10	--	--
Aircraft	8	21	--	--	--	--
Worker struck by vehicle, mobile equipment	--	--	--	--	4	9
Assaults and violent acts	--	--	4	8	7	16
Homicides	--	--	--	--	7	16
Self-inflicted injuries	--	--	3	6	--	--
Contact with objects and equipment	3	8	8	16	4	9
Struck by object	--	--	5	10	--	--
Caught in or compressed by equipment or objects	--	--	--	--	3	7
Caught in or crushed in collapsing materials	--	--	--	--	--	--
Falls	3	8	6	12	8	18
Fall to lower level	3	8	5	10	7	16
Exposure to harmful substances or environments	--	--	3	6	6	13
Contact with electrical current	--	--	--	--	3	7
Fires and explosions	--	--	--	--	--	--

See footnotes at end of table.

Table 2. Fatal occupational injuries by detailed event or exposure in the United States and the Mountain states, 2002

(continued)

Event or exposure 1/	Fatalities					
	New Mexico		Utah		Wyoming	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	63	100	52	100	32	100
Transportation incidents	37	59	35	67	17	53
Highway	26	41	18	35	12	38
Nonhighway incident, except rail, air, water	3	5	5	10	--	--
Aircraft	8	13	6	12	--	--
Worker struck by vehicle, mobile equipment	--	--	4	8	--	--
Assaults and violent acts	5	8	3	6	--	--
Homicides	4	6	3	6	--	--
Self-inflicted injuries	--	--	--	--	--	--
Contact with objects and equipment	12	19	5	10	6	19
Struck by object	8	13	3	6	--	--
Caught in or compressed by equipment or objects	--	--	--	--	--	--
Caught in or crushed in collapsing materials	--	--	--	--	3	9
Falls	3	5	--	--	4	13
Fall to lower level	3	5	--	--	4	13
Exposure to harmful substances or environments	4	6	4	8	4	13
Contact with electrical current	3	5	--	--	--	--
Fires and explosions	--	--	--	--	--	--

1/ Based on the 1992 BLS Occupational Injury and Illness Classification Structure.

NOTE: Totals for major categories may include subcategories not shown separately. Percentages may not add to totals because of rounding.

Dashes indicate no data reported or data that do not meet publication criteria.